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LIBERMANN : A SPIRITUAL GUIDE FOR OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The article published below first appeared in the French review LA VIE SPIRITUELLE. Its author, an authority on Libermann, is of the opinion that it is as valid to-day as it was then. We thank Canon BLANCHARD and the editor of the review for granting us permission to reproduce it (permission accorded on December 30, 1980).

Father Libermann's last words before he died on February 2, 1852, were a summary of all his spirituality: «God is all : man is nothing». The Centenary of that day was celebrated in many places last year. In the Church, a powerful Congregation bears witness by its vitality, to how deeply rooted was its foundation. At Paris and Lyon the memory of this man of God, this servant of Yahveh who so well defined his own role in the words: «I was made to suffer and be criticised» was evoked with emotion and enthusiasm. His place in its human, supernatural and apostolic dimensions was determined but his doctrine was not exposed. And yet, Libermann was one of the greatest spiritual leaders of the nineteenth century. To him was given the charism of being a spiritual director, of priests in particular. He was aware of this grace conferred upon him and felt a responsibility for this mission: *I believe that God has*

1 In our quotations we shall use the following abbreviations in reference to our sources:

L.S. I, p. . . . = Lettres Spirituelles du Vénérable Libermann, Vol. I, 3rd edition, Paris Poussielgue.

L.S. II, p. . . . = Lettres Spirituelles . . . , vol. II, 2nd edition ;

L.S. III, p. . . . = ditto, vol. III, 2nd edition

C.p. = Lettres Spirituelles de notre Vénérable Père aux membres de la Congrégation: General Procure, 30 Rue Lhomond, Paris.

Co. . . . , p. = Commentaire des douze premiers chapitres du Saint Évangile selon Saaint Jean, 2nd edition, The Mother-House, 30 Rue Lhomond, Paris.

been pleased to give me a special grace for the truths of salvation and the direction of certain souls . . . It is a grace given exclusively for others, which benefits me myself not at all (C.p. 320). In his humility, he would have been embarrassed to be described as a master . . . *Clearly Our Lord wants me as a servant in his Church, not at all as a master; I should, as a consequence, be ready to render service to everybody* (L.S. II, 34). But, if he can describe with such wonderful precision the mysterious ways of God, the obscure working of grace in souls, it can only be that he had himself experienced the ineffable effects of this action. Although very reticent on his own interior life, in his letters to his disciples, he does reveal something of his touching exchange with God. Although long, we do not hesitate to quote a page from a letter written to a religious on August 3, 1846. It reveals very correctly the existence and the quality of the mystical experience Libermann enjoyed; and it will also throw light on the analyses to follow and give them the hall-mark of witness :

How ardently I desire to console and sustain your soul in the difficult battles to which the enemy exposes you, let me once again speak a word about myself, on condition you never mention it to anyone.

As to my present state, I have already told you what I thought and I spoke truthfully. It is only of my past therefore that I can speak in order to destroy the basis of your temptation. Let me tell you I have never meditated on the virtues, not even on those of Jesus and Mary : I have never been able to draw a conclusion nor take a resolution at the end of my meditation on the practice of the virtues, in view of deciding what to do or what to teach. Sometimes I have attributed that to the upset of my nervous system : sometimes to a natural incapacity. I am well aware that I have grown strongly in soul, more elevated, that my judgment has become broader and more correct; but I am also certain that grace alone has brought that out of nothing, has strengthened what is weak and corrected what was defective.

That is so clear and true, that were I to become an unbeliever, I could never deny the existence and the action of grace in my soul. When I spoke of the virtues and of perfection, it has never been because of a preparatory meditation. Rather, in the course of the conversation, truths presented and classified themselves and developed. At these times, I had the impression of being illuminated in mind and strengthened in will.

This impression lasts only as long as I speak. This makes me believe that the grace was given for others and I tremble for my own salvation. I trust in the mercy of God, nevertheless. In brief, I have achieved nothing of myself, neither intellectual knowledge, force of will or practice of virtue : God has given me all : He has attracted me without asking my permission and with a vehemence I have not so far encountered in any other person.

I was in the beginning very lax, very indifferent, a nothing in what concerned the supernatural life. Our Lord gave me the grace to resist my father, who willed to drag me away from the faith. After that, the Master unexpectedly came to drag me away from myself and for five years he held my faculties captive and absorbed : yet, in all that time, I never thought of working to acquire one virtue after another ; my whole concern was to be with Him and that was very easy. In all that time I had no clear idea of the spiritual life (C.pp. 325-327)

The limited space at our disposal makes it impossible to present the Libermannian doctrine in its totality and with all its detail of light and shade. We can just about outline the general plan, enumerate the essential characteristics and indicate how apt it is to our contemporary world. We would like to address it in particular to priests and seminarians and to encourage them to read carefully the fine pages that constitute *Lettres Spirituelles* and *Correspondance aux membres de la Congrégation* (The *Spiritual Letters* and *Letters to members of the Congregation*). Those who take the trouble to make this study will be overwhelmed by the riches and astonished at the prophetic intuitions of this man of God. Holiness is a necessary requirement of the priestly life : *a priest who is not holy is a monstrosity in the order of grace* (L.S.I, p. 510). A missionary spirit is an essential of the priesthood : *if you have not a missionary spirit you have not the true priestly spirit* (C.p. 492). Adaptability is a law of the apostolate and a condition of its efficacy : *in latter times, the defect of the clergy has always been that it has remained bogged down in the thought of times past* (L.S. III, p. 618). It is most interesting to read his reflections on the (French) Revolution of 1848 (L.S. III, pp. 610-618, Letter 178) and to see how much this mystic was a man of his own time.

Our principal concern being to set out in all their purity the major topics of his doctrine and the fundamental principles of his direction, we have chosen to adopt the method of presenting an objective synthesis of this spirituality, so that, in general and in detail, our assertions are supported by texts we

consider most significant. In this we hope to avoid any arbitrary or too personal rearrangement. In this we hope also to help our readers by referring them to the most important passages: thus enabling them to estimate and criticise our assertions, commentaries and interpretations. Finally, it is our desire to be faithful to Libermann's own thinking and not draw upon ourselves his judgment on a work on St. Francis de Sales: *In our view, the spirit of St. Francis de Sales is not well presented: the author sets forth rather his own spirit than that of the Saint* (L.S. II, p. 482).

It is sometimes said that Libermann is not a writer. So be it! But one who knows him, before too readily accepting this view, will recall well-turned phrases, lively expressions, original imagery, a multitude of precise definitions, numerous enlightening distinctions and above all, the extremely acute analyses which abound in his work.

Another remark we would make concerns the tenor of his doctrine. Libermann spoke particularly to seminarians, priests and religious. Nevertheless his counsels, the result of deep experience, touch souls in other circles and have a universal significance.

I

THE WORLD OF LIBERMANN

To understand libermann it is necessary to penetrate his interior world, immerse oneself in the heart of his thought and grasp the principal elements of his mental process.

A world of faith

Libermann is a son of Abraham: The light that illumines his horizon, justifies his ideas, inspires his whole action, gives stability to all his intentions is faith: faith in its absolute purity: *Live the faith, my dear friend, and, for the rest, do not worry. If you live a life of pure faith, you will not experience the presence of Jesus in you in a way that is clear and guaranteed, in a sensible way. For, as soon as you are won by conviction, it is no longer faith*(L.S.I, p. 413)

– *Faith, dear sir, but faith in all its purity and dryness. let that be your food No more pictures, shapes, multiple actions, theatricals* (L.S. II, p. 15). *Nothing to satisfy the senses, even spiritual*(Ib. p. 18). He urges a seminary director to train his seminarians to walk in *purity and simplicity of faith* (L.S. I, p. 488). He elsewhere defines what he means by purity of faith: *A pure faith is one whose conduct is no longer supported by sense-consolation: where, in consequence, a person is deprived of every thing, even direction* (L.S. III, p. 381). It is important to out-grow childhood-psychological childhood – to no longer rely on men and to attain the maturity of the christian state: *Our Lord should replace all: Faith is virile fortitude* (L.S. III, p. 382).

The one who lives by this faith builds his house upon a rock: *Do not seek what impresses the sense, I beg you, but what is sound* (L.S. II, p. 79). He acquires that stability which consists in a sure and solid interior, in which faithfulness and true virtue reside (L.S. II, p. 273). The state of sanctity is not a state of something felt but of something wanted (L.S. III, p. 378). We should not mistake a fear felt purely organically with true humility: *Do not be like those good women who try hard to weep over the death of a husband, while in their heart of hearts, they do not care very much*(L.S. II, p. 71).

A World of Self-Deprivation

His purity of faith presumes a disengagement from the things of sense and demand as an indispensable condition a mortification that is really significant: not only morally but metaphysically and mystically: *The sacrifice of self is over and above all else and is our whole strength* (L.S. III, p. 625), because it brings the soul into God's presence in all its nakedness (L.S.I., p. 116). Libermann, well balanced in judgment, was always careful to avoid excess. While he always counsels a mortification that is negative, deprivation of all for love of God, which is a requirement of this love, he is more discreet in recommending positive and afflictive mortification. This latter can be dangerous for certain temperaments and is not *of the essence of the apostolic spirit* (L.S. III, p. 29; III, p. 521).

The predominant note of Libermannien spirituality therefore is not a fanatical and morbid desire of crucifixion unlimited and without ultimate purpose. It is only one element of a living synthesis and should not be isolated from the other ele-

ments. Inspired by his general view of passivity, Libermann prefers crosses that are sent to us, humiliations imposed upon us, to chosen sacrifices however prudent their choice.

Since the cross sets a divine seal of authenticity upon our hearts and make them truly efficacious, obstacles instead of discouraging are a challenge, a stimulus: *The greater the difficulties, the greater is the fortitude and joy of my soul* (L.S. LLL, p. 412) Obstacles put our faithfulness to the test and show us how necessary divine action is. Reflecting on his life, he discovers in it one law for him. *I could never realise any plan I dreamed of. As if by magic, I have always achieved everything to which I was providentially introduced – amidst crosses and sufferings, of course* – (C.p. 602).

A World of Peace

When a soul lives in the purity of theological faith and is generous in metaphysical spiritual deprivation, it knows peace. Peace is the fruit of detachment, the consequence of the total gift of self. A proprietary attachment to things and enslavement to creatures produces and feeds disquiet. Peace is a sign of the presence of God, the God of Peace, the peace of God: above all else, it is an infallible means of continual mental prayer. Libermann is unceasing in his insistence upon this condition: he is careful at the same time to define it and to distinguish it from its counterfeit, so that illusion may be obviated. *Peace before God, peace in God, the peace of renunciation and of death, not a peace of indifference; a peace of love and union, not an artificial peace resulting from mere forgetfulness of what troubles us, or from mere human effort . . . Your peace should never fear and not always run away from difficulties or temptations: it should overcome them* (L. S. II, 27).

This interior peace, the accompaniment of God's presence and action in us would be jeopardised were the soul to indulge in introspection or to seek perfection vehemently: two dangers pointed out by Libermann.

The spiritual attitude favorable to holiness is not concern with self but a going out of oneself to God: *See God in you as independent of you* (L.S. II, pp. 35-436). Our attention should be fixed on the final end of a spiritual life, God; it should not stop at what leads to him (L.S. II, 278-279). We sanctify

ourselves, not for ourselves but for God. Personality development is neither the essence or the end of holiness, but merely a consequence of it. The knowledge which avoids and excludes this self-analysis always produces a superabundance of love (L.S. III, p. 265). In this outward-looking view Libermann condemns all excess of culpability, which is an obstacle to God's love and mercy : *Do not withdraw your soul from God to go chasing after your faults : rather, keep it peacefully in His presence until He reveals them* (L.S.I., p. 101). Is it not indeed a form of pride to think only of yourself, even of your own innate poverty? Forgetfulness of self is both a condition and a fruit of love : it is the criterion of humility : *To forget all creatures, to be forgotten by all creatures, to forget oneself* (L.S. p. 339) The world of Libermann is not a morbid world of faults and qualms of conscience but a world of peace and love. The attitude which best corresponds to this spirituality is that of ecstasy, it implies a definitive going out of oneself.

Any straining after perfection (not to be confused with ardent seeking of perfection of which it is a distortion)² would endanger this peace and be distinguished more by natural effort than by the dynamism of grace. Libermann set his face firmly against not merely obsession with one's fault but, the obsessive seeking of perfection, of form, of rhythm or degree as well as certain means of perfection : obsessions and stresses incompatible with the liberty and self-surrender of children of God. *Grace does not keep pace with desire* (L.S. III, p. 352). *A glance of love, without effort, without this kind of violent fixity* (L.S. III, 66) : *don't try to do things too perfectly* (L.S. II, p. 120) : *all the ardour of your desires should be in the heart and will : your intelligence rather than give should receive* (L.S. II, 259).

This last declaration reveals the secret of Libermannian spirituality, bringing into relief its governing principle, that of passivity. Mgr Jean Gay, in a recent study³ writes that *the term self-surrender sums up all his teaching*. Libermann could be called *the Doctor of self-surrender*. To me the term *passivity*

² On this topic read L.S. III, p. 166, p. 183 p. 602, p. 59, especially letter 274, L.S. III, pp. 175-178.

³ Mgr Jean Gay – "«The Missionary Doctrine of the Venerable Libermann»" (La Doctrine missionnaire du Vénérable Libermann, imprimerie Catholique, Basse-Terre (Guadeloupe), 1945, p. 3).

seems more all-embracing. Is not the practical attitude of self-surrender a consequence of the theoretical and theological concept of passivity?

From a phenomenological study of the spirit of Libermann we now turn to a plan of the structure, therefore metaphysical, of his doctrine.

II

THE PRINCIPAL POINTS OF THE DOCTRINE AND THE GENERAL LINES OF THE METHOD.

Father Libermann was a convert Jew, brought up on the Old Testament. God had seized upon him, like Paul possessed by Christ on the Damascus Road. He was not the author of his own conversion. God converted him. From 1825, he felt himself flooded by God, swept away by Him on unforeseen paths. Before teaching and recommending passivity, Libermann had lived it. He had experienced both the power and the gentleness of divine action⁴.

Mystical Passivity

Say nothing, do nothing, think nothing, so that Jesus alone may speak, act and think in you. When, my dear friend, will we be nothing before him? (L.S.I., p. 449).

Before dying, Libermann murmured: God is all; man is nothing. This is the principle of passivity: God is all, God does all. In the order of action, as in the order of being, God is the prime mover. Sanctification is in the first place the work

⁴ Time and again we find this passivity amongst Jewish converts or those on the way to conversion: the Ratisbonne brothers, Schwob, Bergson, S. Weil, etc. This is so significant that it deserves a special study: the significance of passivity from the point of view of character and spirituality in the religious psychology of the Jews.

of grace, the call of God. Libermann is also as anti-Pelagian as any one could desire: *It is by grace you must advance in perfection, not by your own effort* (L.S. II, p. 433). Grace is not grasped but given: holiness is not primarily a conquest but a communication. Passivity is a positive consent to the fulness of God's action in us (L.S. III, p. 132, letter 240); at the same time, it is, negatively, the avoidance of all action arising solely out of our own nature and which is opposed to the perfection of divine action (L.S. II, p. 315). Hence the formulas that fall from Libermann's lips and pen, so repugnant to humanists but so clear to mystics who delight in them: formulas to be interpreted practically and in a spiritual sense, not theoretically and in a metaphysical one. Nature is not by him considered here as a structure but as an ensemble of evil inclinations: *We must... desire most ardently before God the total destruction of all natural life and strive in all things to be united to God and to live only by His life* (L.S.I, p. 182). And again he writes: *The life of nature is always an obstacle to the life of grace: we reach perfection only when grace has more or less extinguished and quenched nature* (L.S. II, p. 452). Is there not a danger that this passivity, which frees us of Pelagianism, may not dispose us to a kind of Quietism? Where does human effort come in? This passivity implies in its concept an activity of self-denial and provokes an apostolic action rendered one hundred times more efficacious: for, it is God who acts in and through us. Bergson has excellent formulas: *The soul is active and acted upon... mystics are patient before God, active before men*⁵. Insofar as a man let's God act in him, is ready to be an instrument of God acting through him, his action will be better, his activity more efficacious.

Many and picturesque are the images on which Libermann calls to illustrate and explain his teaching: the soul before God as an anvil at the disposition of the blacksmith (L.S. III, p. 115), as clay in the hands of the potter (L.S. III, p. 160), as a statue in the hands of the sculptor (L.S. II, pp. 153-154), as a toy obedient to the whims of a child (L.S.II, pp. 330, 481; III, p. 385); as the soiled and torn old cloth used by the housewife (L.S. II, p. 332; III, p. 372), as the beast of burden that is loaded and beaten (L.S. III, 325), as a baby

⁵ Bergson "The Two Sources", 15 edition, p. 248.

who lives under the eye and in the smile of its mother (L.S. II, p. 166).

His principle of passivity inspires a psychological attitude of being reduced to size (L.S. III, p. 277), of waiting on God's good pleasure, (L.S. III, p. 153 – the whole letter –; II, p. 126b; III, p. 371) of patience and unconcern under adversity (L.S. III, p. 162), of loving faithfulness to grace, its rhythm and demands: we must not seek to outstrip the grace received (L.S. II, p. 474): finally and especially, spiritual childhood (C.p. 263). This principle has application both to spiritual and to apostolic life. The holiness to which we have been called is not that we conjure up in the imagination but the one to which God calls us, (L.S. III, p. 378). It is better to welcome trials received from God than to choose those to our own taste: it is imprudent to seek them, (L.S. I, 528). In temptation, the wisest strategy is *to remain immobile* (C.p. 319). In mental prayer it is better to listen to God rather than to talk to Him, (L.S. III, 175). In action, Libermann was always afraid of infiltrating his personal views rather than cooperating in God's plans: *Suffering for the salvation of souls* – a form of passive working – *is most efficacious* (C.p. 655). This was why, concerning vocations, he liked to recall that it is for the Lord Himself to choose His workers (C.p. 2). He wrote to a seminarian: *I do not want to take you myself: Jesus must give you* (L.S. II, p. 582). He always dreaded assuming missions (as a result of his own initiative or because he had taken the first steps) which God had not decided to confide to him. In consequence, he both practised and counselled self-forgetfulness. *Forget yourself and do nothing to be either remembered or forgotten* (E.S. II, p. 445) God knows who His servants are. Prepare yourself rather than put yourself forward. The difficulties that arise in the apostolate are caused above all by substituting our own views for the light of faith: if men of God lived in the climate of faith, the light of God, if each and all lived with God, do you think deep disagreements, scandalous confrontations, definite breaking-off of relations would arise? *When we see things from God's point of view, we are easily in agreement* (C. pp. 18-19).

In this obscure and tumultuous world of our interior life and many conflicting emotions how can we discern what is a dictate of nature and what a call of grace, what a claim of man and what a demand of God? A certain spiritual criteriology is necessary to enable us to recognise the influence of the Spirit,

by signs that, if not certain, are at least probable? Reading the LETTERS we can pick out many valuable remarks on this. Nature can be recognised by its vagaries, grace by its consistency (L.S. II, pp. 601-602). The power of nature is harsh: the power of grace gentle (L.S. II, 468). Nature generates eagerness, haste: grace breeds peace (L.S. III, p. 176). The man who allows himself to be led by his impulsiveness, rushes ahead: the one who listens for the voice of the Spirit commits himself to it (L.S. II, p. 6).

The Primary of Experience

Spiritual truth is the knowledge and acknowledgment of God's action in us. Moreover, the method that gives birth to the doctrine of passivity should concede a primacy of value to interior experience and not have recourse to systems as to transpositions of this experience and to merely secondary means of interpreting it. Souls, all different, do not all travel on the same ready-built road but follow in the footsteps of God. In His infinite liberty, the Holy Spirit takes small account of our categories, our degrees, our positions: *Don't measure the goodness of God with the help of a theological compass*, wrote Libermann humourously (L.S. II, p. 79). God leads souls according to His truth and their sincerity with themselves. Libermann is not a theoretician of mystical theology, but a practitioner in directing souls: he never deviates from his basic realism. With his penetrating scrutiny, he determines interior states and recommends the same line of conduct to his missionaries: *Do not consider things in the light of the imagination, but view them calmly and weigh them practically* (C.p. 221). He warns his sons against imagination which constructs and reconstructs, falsifies and deforms everything. Who would query the legitimacy of the distinctions he draws between novitiates and resolutions of imagination and of action (C.p. 456), between the recollection of imagination and the recollection of authentic charity (L.S. III, pp. 626-627). *Do not remain too closed in upon yourself, because of your timidity or the fear of losing your recollection. The recollection lost by work amongst men is merely a recollection of the imagination: the true interior recollection of divine charity you do not lose. Charity does not destroy charity; that is to say, charity practised towards men does not cause you to lose charity to God: on the contrary, it*

increases and perfects it, even though you may lose sight of the palpable and the imaginary.

Several times Libermann came back on this point, categorically: the interior life is known by reflecting upon what has been experienced and not by a study of handbooks of ascetical and mystical theology, however useful they may be: *Remember well this principle, you should not read spiritual writers to learn the theory of the interior life. I would not wish you to know it by any others means than your own interior practice* (L.S. II, p. 588). He did not guide those he directed to systems of spirituality opening up visions of the nature of perfection, any more than he did not expose all the truth. Listen to this warning: *Do not say such and such a system of spirituality pleases me, it seems right to me: therefore, it is true. To know these things, which demand experiential not just speculative knowledge, you must have an interior life: they are a grace given by the Holy Spirit and learnt by experience* (L.S. III, p. 105). If the soul must seek the truth about God and his life, in purity of faith and nakedness of self-denial, then a fortiori it should not be enslaved to methods, have techniques and practices imposed upon it, be forced to adopt a particular school of spirituality by the director: *In the matter of direction let it be acknowledged as a fundamental principle that the one directed should not be too cramped or restricted: he should not have too many rules imposed on him: without exposing oneself to doing wrong by the souls directed, one should not follow systems in the spiritual life... I regard it as a cardinal point of direction to allow grace to act with fullest freedom...*» (L.S. III, 349-350)

Undoubtedly, Libermann had studied the works of M. Olier, during his formation at Saint-Sulpice. Later he would write of him: Retain not the words but the substance of what he says (L.S. II, p. 329). He had read St John Eudes, St Francis de Sales, St Teresa and St Johan of the Cross. He was not at all dazzled by the last-mentioned of these: *All he says is wonderful but Our Divine Master is more wonderful still...* it is certain that we should seek our light, our holiness and our life in Him alone, seek nothing outside of Him (L.S.I., p. 451. Read all this letter 94).

The Holiness of Jesus

Libermann discourages people from an idolatrous attachment to systems, schools, methods, which are representative

of partial and particular truths. His purpose in doing so is to fix their attention on the universal, personal Truth, that is Our Lord Jesus Christ. During his stay in Rome in 1840, he spent all his spare time meditating upon the Gospel of St John in his attic in the Via del Pinacolo. He left a Commentary, unfortunately incomplete, stopping at Chapter XIII. In this Gospel, he found a text that both impressed and enraptured him and which he often quoted and explained in his letters: *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink* (Jn. VII, 37)⁶. *Well, are you thirsty? Glue your soul to this source of living waters and drink deep of love: rivers of love will stream out from you to fill the souls to whom Divine love sends you* (L.S. III, p. 270).

That type of love is not to be created or invented. It exists. It is ours to discover, to study and to imitate. Our love should be in the image of Jesus Himself: *Let there be in your souls the holiness of Jesus* (L.S. II, p. 22 : all letter 104). But, since our interior life can only be a reproduction of the life of Jesus, in accordance with the graces received and our own limitations, it is important for us to know first of all the soul of Jesus. Such knowledge can be acquired only by a prolonged, patient, loving contemplation of this Beloved One: *I advise you to concentrate your attention . . . especially, on the action of God in the soul of Jesus. Forget yourself and all that goes on in you and let your unique thought be the contemplation of Jesus, the penetration of His divine interior and so give His divine life life, in your own soul* (L.S. II, p. 213). Under the influence of the Holy Spirit you will pierce his deepest intentions discern all His movements, assimilate His Spirit, you will be *steeped in Him* (L.S. II, p. 227).

Here again, here above all else, the endeavour of the soul is simply one of consent to the action of God, of submission to the influence of Jesus. It is not we who steep ourselves in his Spirit: it is He who pours out His Spirit upon us. We do not. We do not shape Christ in us: it is Christ who moulds us in His likeness. We let Him do so: when Jesus wishes to paint his portrait in this way on a soul, that divine portrait is much better realised if His is the only hand to touch it: any human hand that would intervene could only spoil it, like a

⁶ See: Commentary of St John, pp. 321, 327, Letters I, p. 460; III, p. 269.

monkey trying to paint a picture on which he had seen his master at work (L.S.I., p. 492; all letter 101). The Holiness of Jesus is, thus, the final, exemplary and efficient cause of our holiness: *Be all to Jesus, all to souls for Jesus' sake, and all to Jesus for the sake of souls* (C.p. 600).

Presence of Mary

Mary is inseparable from Jesus in the realisation of the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Redemption and the sanctification of souls. Holding to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects, after the spirit of the French School, Libermann is led to the Blessed Virgin Mary and gives her her true place. He contemplates her in the highest levels, in her incomprehensible union with the Divine Persons. It would appear he loved above all to reflect upon her in her relations with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

A seminarian asked him to explain the well-known prayer of Fr Condren O JESU VIVENS IN MARIA. Libermann replied with a scrupulously detailed exegesis of the phrases that have genuinely rabbinical subtlety. His exegesis is in style contemplative and ecstatic. All his own rich marial experience is reflected in it. He analyses the spirit of this prayer and stresses the object of this intercession. It is a matter of the soul gazing upon Jesus and Mary: upon Jesus living in Mary as in a perfect temple, upon Mary full to overflowing of the holiness of Jesus. Libermann is careful to remove the danger of a "separate" marial devotion, that is, of a devotion in which Mary would be, as it were, isolated from the most Holy Trinity. He writes: *It should be observed that, though the soul is deeply moved, penetrated, attracted by this divine and adorable view of Jesus in Mary, it's principal, direct gaze and it's love and desire to attract this life to itself, is centred upon Jesus. At the same time, it is seized upon and infatuated by Jesus operating in Mary, that is, by Jesus living in Mary* (L.S. II, p. 510). The soul, plunged in this double vision of holiness, longs for Jesus to dwell in her as He does in Mary, all due proportion respected: *The soul entering into the desire of participating in all the divine mysteries, which she sees realised so perfectly in Mary through the life of Jesus in her, begs for this universal participation* (L.S. II, p. 520).

Father Libermann was also attracted by the relationship of Mary with the Holy Spirit. As master of novices with the

Eudists, he had studied the writings of the Founder, an apostle *swallowed up in love of Mary, ravished with love of the divine interior of Jesus and Mary* (L.S.I., p. 346). His devotion to the Holy Heart of Mary however ante-dated his sojourn at Rennes. He inherited it from the tradition of the Franch School at Saint-Sulpice and the predominant influence of M. Desgenettes. In a letter, which is at the same time a recollection of the past, to the parish priest of Our Lady of Victories (L.S. III, letter 317,n, pp. 360-371) he recalls how his work for the Blacks owed its existence and its progress to the Heart of Mary. *As it was Mary who brought us together, so this devoted Mother wished us to feel that we owed all to her Holy and Immaculate Heart.* When he made his foundation, he did not hesitate to put it under her protection. Later, when the "fusion" of his Congregation and that of the Holy Ghost took place, he had no difficulty in uniting both names. He calmed the fears of one of his sons by explaining the significance of the new title: *You belong to the Holy heart of Mary and you always will. Our union with the Community of the Holy Ghost can only increase our devotion to our love of the Heart of Mary, which gave life to our poor little Society. We have always found our peace and happiness in the Heart of Mary filled with the eminent superabundance of the Holy Spirit. If we have not always explicitly mentioned this consideration of the plenitude of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Mary, it has nevertheless been the essence of our devotion to that most Holy Heart. So, we are not changing but merely expressing now what we always understood, what we always took for granted formerly* (C. pp. 597-598).

On this solid theological foundation he based his marian doctrine, in these illuminating perspectives his spirituality developed. Devotion to the Mother of God was (and so he intended it to be understood) a requirement of fervour and charity: *If you cultivate the habit of living close to Jesus and Mary, you cannot fail to grow strong and to be soon filled with divine love: when one is between two furnaces filled with fire, he cannot fail to be burned* (L.S. II, pp. 209-210). Intimacy with the Blessed Virgin consoles in trial: *Jesus and his Holy Cross, that is your allotted portion. The Holy Heart of Mary, that is your refuge* (L. III, p. 115) Mary's way of living is the model of apostolic life. To Father Logier, becoming impatient of inactivity, he writes on May 6, 1851: *Behold the Immaculate Heart of Mary! Behold the sufferings she underwent for the salvation of the world! Mary did not go out to preach the Gospel of her Son, but suffered in her*

Heart: that was her sole apostolate. Well, was it not a greater one than that of all the apostles? (C.p. 655).

What breaks through these few notes on the Marian life of Libermann is the perfect equilibrium of his theological ideas, and in consequence the correctness of his piety. What also strikes is his certitude of the all-powerful mediation of the Mother of God in the development of the Church: a certitude acquired in his reflection on her interior life and her apostolic action. Here we are face to face with one of the most exalted Marian experiences that the history of spirituality can record and verify.

State of Prayer

How can one steep oneself in the Spirit of Jesus, if he does not enter into His world, if His interior states do not become his own interior states. Prayer alone gives entry, preserves and makes us progress in the world of Jesus. For Libermann, prayer is not an intellectual exercise (L.S.I., p. 405), a presence of God to the mind and through the mind (C.p. 77), a result of introspection and attention to self (L.S. II, p. 477). It is a gaze and exercise of love. The soul, unfolds itself and is unfolded before Jesus (L.S. II, p. 231). It realises this presence by faith and in faith. It is swallowed up in an adoration that is utterly forgetful, of self, utterly unselfish, wholly outgoing to God: *In your prayer pay particular attention to adoration: if it is fervent, all will be fervent* (L.S. III, p. 19). The quality of a spiritual life depends upon the quality of prayer; the quality of prayer depends upon the quality of adoration. Adoration is a state: *a state of peace before God* (L.S.I., 421).

Prayer is a state of soul, or at least tends to become so. The soul does not exhaust itself, accumulating formulas, making acts of love, but roots itself in a state of love: *Regarding your prayer, you tell me you have all the trouble in the world drawing out of your Heart a few words of love. My answer to that is, why do you want to do so? Leave the loving words in your heart: Jesus is there: He will take them to Himself. Your present state consists in keeping yourself in the presence of Jesus with interior love, not to make acts of love* (L.S. II, 570). Exercises are only a means to maintain and intensify the state: *Does a man of clear vision wear glasses?* (L.S.I. p. 100).

Libermann tells us that prayer is more a matter of listening to God than of speaking to Him. But He can only be heard by one empty of self (L.S. II, p. 355). There is a connection we cannot define between this setting aside of self and passivity. Always we find these two conditions. God is the more active in us the less we ourselves are active; and we are less active in the measure of our self-emptiness: then the plenitude of God fills the human vacuum. Because prayer is a state, a state of love, it is extremely simple and tends always to move forward to even grater simplicity: *An important principle of the spiritual life is to simplify things as much as possible: the more our conduct is simple and uniform the more perfect it is and the easier for us to maintain* (L.S.I., p. 419). Libermann did not encourage *small devotions* (L.S.I., p. 140) by reason of which we dally in the side paths when, free of soul, we should be going forward in the sunshine of the great open spaces, in the way of Jesus Christ. He knew someone, he said (was it not himself?) who liked to wear the scapular as a sign of his belonging to Mary but who was less inclined to say prayers in order to gain all possible indulgences (L.S.I., p. 105). It was not that he despised indulgences, but that he feared to lose his interior liberty and spiritual simplicity; feared to lose all – the essential – in wanting to gain too much. To the capitalist concept of devotions, Libermann preferred that of evangelical poverty, to the exhausting work of exercises of piety and psychological practices, *rest simple, humble, peaceable and full of confidence before Our Lord* (L.S. III, p. 462).

On the basis of his own personal experience, in masterly fashion he outlined the general principles of prayer while not overlooking the difficulties, the troubles of a soul in search of God, a jealous God who wishes to be pursued, a hidden God who yields Himself gradually, a God who becomes a consuming fire for the soul that undertakes this adventure. Serenely he explains to a seminarian in a few phrases how the dramatic problem of prayer presents itself: *I fully understand your difficulty in prayer. If you use your reason, it becomes a plaything of the mind and hard work. If you do not reason, your mind used to being active grows weary and remains lazy. It is this laziness that weighs you down and is the root of your trouble. Perhaps, you could determine a little more precisely the subject of your prayer, without however taking a subject for your prayer and reasoning about it* (L.S. III, p. 236, letter 289). Let not the conciseness and brevity on this analysis hide its richness, nor its apparent

coldness veil the dramatic situation it evokes. Libermann envisages two hypotheses: either the filling the times set apart for prayer with readings, meditations, litany formulas and there is no prayer. We should not confuse meditation, an exercise in refection, with prayer, a living contact with the living God. Or you abandon all else to encounter God: in this one experiences an indefinable void, which gives rise to weariness. Many souls abandon prayer because they are frightened of this emptiness and find it intolerable. They love God and cant establish contact with Him. We receive God's presence in an absence: that is a consequence of living in faith. The psychological problem of prayer cannot be isolated from the metaphysical mystery of our life in the faith. To live in faith is to live in darkness. The solution lies in adopting the existential position of God's absence, while being certain of His existence and excluding the desire for an experience of Him.

The Way of Love

"There is a final theme we should single out: what might be described as libermannian anti-intellectualism.

Libermann never grows tired of recalling the principle: that holiness is not in the intelligence but in the will (L.S. II, p. 573); that we go to God by way of the heart, not the mind (L.S. II, p. 580); that in christian perfection the principal and most important thing is not to know, to conceive, to be acquainted with, but to do (L.S. II, p. 491). His originality however does not reside in this affirmation with its classical echoes but elsewhere. First of all, it is in the vigourousness of his denunciation of a certain rationalism, much more common than is generally believed, which is an obstacle to the spiritual life. The immoderate desire to know, the insatiable curiosity of the intelligence, are a real and serious danger (see especially letter 84, I, pp. 404-408; also I, p. 338 and II, p. 344)⁷, and the true way to become unfaithful to Jesus Christ. In his COMMENTARY ON SAINT JOHN he has pointed out this

⁷ "The curiosity of mind, which direct its attention now to this and now to that loves to vary the object of its attention and is easily attracted by novelty" (L.S. I, p. 421).

unfortunate tendency, this purely verbal mysticism: *We are very subtle about spiritual things, we explain everything, but it is rare that fundamentally we act with the fervour and simplicity of our ancestors and fathers in the faith... by examination of and by reasoning upon this fervour of spirit which does all, we damp it down. By contrast, the Saints have felt this powerful urge and without further investigation have yielded entirely to it* (pp. 330-331). He is original also in trying to discern what, in psychological states, is proper to the intelligence and what proceeds from love, what is genuinely in accordance with perfection. He thus distinguishes between an application of intelligence, contemplative in form, *by way of understanding and by way of abandonment* (L.S.I., p. 336, that intellectual contemplation which constitutes the philosophical life, and the fixation of the will which is totally concentrated on what is holy (L.S. III, p. 157): between the impulse of the intelligence and that of will. Let us pause at this last scoring of differences: *if the heart of this impression and of this movement is in the will; if the intelligence is not too active; if there is a certain impulsion, but a gentle one, which fills with God and is communicated by what is impressed upon the will; if that impulsion moves towards God as its objective; if it brings to the intelligence gentleness, calmness, humble moderation; if its driving force is in the will and not in the intelligence, the sign is good* (L.S. II, p. 574).

The reminder of the principles is accompanied by practical directives. Holy Scripture is to be approached and thoroughly studied not out of curiosity, which would *prostitute* it (L.S. II, p. 347) but in a contemplative mood. We thirst for truth and life: it is not by having recourse to books we shall slake that thirst: we must go to the source, Jesus Christ (L.S.I., p. 35). Books do not give Divine knowledge (L.S. II, p. 194), that loving knowledge of God, that wisdom, thanks to which, says St. Augustine, truth is not merely contemplated but possessed and transformed into life. We should keep only such books as translate an authentic experience and *help the state of prayer* (L.S.II, p. 482). We should not read much anyhow (L.S. II, pp. 346, 382; III, p. 49). The assimilation of spiritual truth is conditioned by the intensity of our reflection. We should not hesitate to give ourselves intellectual holidays, times where the soul can rest: *Get the habit then of giving your mind an occasional rest. Why should it always be at work and preoccupied? Between the exercises, keep it in prayer before God... Why must your head always be in a book?* (L.S. I,

p. 322). Concerning theology, it can be a means or an obstacle to union with God: that depends on the spirit in which we study it. Its object is supernatural life. If, says Libermann, knowledge of it is acquired solely by the working of the intelligence, it is merely natural. If given by God and in contemplation, it is entirely supernatural. It is mixed if the intellect undertakes it in a spirit of recollection and love of God⁸. The first is dangerous; the second, a charism dangerous to ask for; the third is sanctifying and to be followed (L.S. II, pp. 416-417).

This position of Libermann could be called anti-intellectual, if intellectualism is defined as a metaphysical system, requiring and required by a spiritual attitude: a system in which intelligence is considered the primary value, a privileged means, the principal object and end of truth and life. In isolation from its spiritual context, without reference to the experiential perspective of the author or reference to his own life and attitudes this concept could be misunderstood, become dangerous, even inexact and false. Libermann does not deny the role of knowledge – exegetical, theological, mystic study – in the work of sanctification: he recognises its usefulness and necessity, especially for priests. His intention is only to affirm the primacy of love: he sees knowledge only as anterior to love, proceeding from love, leading to it, maintaining and developing it. In that he is the mystic, preoccupied with union with God, anxious to eliminate all obstacles opposed to that union, hindering or holding it back. That explains his opposition to *isolated* intellectual research, a theology evolving in a rationalist climate and spirit (devoid of the light of faith) or too intellectual (not perceiving charity as its final end). Anyone who has meditated upon the lives of the Saints and who has some experience of souls will not deny the validity of these propositions, which faithfully translate the pure spirit of the Gospel.

Others

In a spiritual life truly christian, the relationship to others by love as the relationship to God by prayer offered, the relation-

⁸ One should not exaggerate these distinctions. They should be read in the context and according to the literary style of his *spiritual letters*. It might also be added that his *mixed theology* could be pursued in an apostolic spirit, in order to win our brothers in Christ.

ship to self by interior reflection, the relationship to history by commitment. The annoying problem of the relationship between contemplation and action, which always finds an inadequate solution unless enlightened by the mystery of charity. The temptation of the Saint is to abandon others for God, but he is truly a Saint only when he reconciles these two movements, movement of recollection with God, and movement outwards to people.

Often Libermann recommends people to pay no attention to men (L.S. II, p. 141, III, p. 386): to live in the world as if we were in the desert (I.S.I., p. 132), to plunge wholly into a two-fold forgetfulness, active and passive – to forget and be forgotten (L.S. II, pp. 400, 339, 392, 455). Is not that a kind of Plotinian escape? Libermann condemns a concern with others which is not or which no longer is related to God: he approves concern with others which is also related to God, concern with God which should also be concern for others. This mystic is an apostle who in one single glance, in one single concern, embraces the Father and His children. The problem of the relationship between contemplation and action is resolved by refusing to separate the two. Action is contemplative, contemplation is active: this assertion is made possible by the fact that the soul is in a state of prayer: *We leave God, to meet God*. We love Jesus in others, we love them with the same love that Jesus has for them, by the same love that we have for Jesus (L.S.I., p. 443). *We should love Jesus in men, as we love the fruit in its husk* (L.S. I, p. 515). This is an equilibrium difficult to establish and maintain, on all the evidence. The danger, the recurring temptation is, because of a diminution of divine love and an increase in human egoism, to love God without men, which is individualism, or to love men without God, which is erotic idolatry. Libermann describes for a seminarian the incessant ascetism of an ever-necessary sublimation: *I love you in God, or rather, I love God in you. I try not to draw away from God in order to move down to you, his creature. I love to raise you up into the very bosom of God, so that I may love you only in Him and for His sake* (L.S. I, p. 40). Thanks to this permanent supernaturalisation of the affections interior liberty, dependance on God, independance of men, will be maintained (L.S. III, p. 286).

Considered in the light of Jesus, others share in this mystery which enlightens and envelops them. Where they are concerned, we practice, in the spirit of Jesus, that charity which

judges not. *Never believe the evil of which there are signs, evil conjectured, even probable* (L.S. III, p. 331); have charity by choice which inclines towards anguish, difficulty: *an unhappy soul should never be condemned by you* (L.S. III, p. 30). Charity is filled with gentleness: *Be sure the spirit of God is not in that. See and weigh whether this positively cutting way is in accordance with God. Had I ninety years of age and fifty years experience, I would not be responsible for speaking in such a destructive way* (C.p. 289). Charity overflows patience and indulgence: *If you do not bear with others, how can you expect Our Lord to support you?* (L.S. III, p.303) Charity understands and pardons, pardons because it understands: *Harshness loses souls, gentleness saves them* (L.S. II, p. 524). Charity appeases, comforts and raises up: *Most souls are lost by discouragement. That is the universal evil* (L.S. III, p. 288) Charity, because it springs from the heart of Jesus, is full of delicacy, tact. In a page of very acute psychology, Father Libermann compares the politeness of worldlings and the charity of Saints: *If your politeness is negative, that is, if your purpose is to avoid whatever can shock in manner, word or bearing, you have no need to think of it, for that is possessed in the instinct and tact acquired by habit. A positive charity, that is, a real and supernatural affection which makes you active in pleasing everybody. That makes you considerate, gentle, humble and enables you to bear patiently the defects of others. But, do not reverse this order, as men of the world do, who profess to be religious: they have a positive politeness and a negative charity. For this reason, their politeness goes much further than their charity: their heart is not in harmony with their mouth* (L.S. II, p. 565).

The Shock of Sanctity

We have tried to re-discover and have just outlined the principal lines of Libermannian spirituality. We now intend to speak of the essential point of his method of direction: to give to souls the shock of sanctity.

The end of the christian life is less salvation (a moralist perspective) than sanctification (a mystical one). It may be questioned whether many souls will attain the first goal if they do not effectively aspire to the second. Certainly, Libermann is convinced that for some salvation is identified with sanctification. Thus he writes to a seminarian: *You can never have a*

foot in both camps: half to God, half to to the world . . . Given your character, you could never steer a middle course (L.S. II, pp. 102-103, all letter 130). Let the soul therefore devote itself exclusively to the work of sanctification (L.S. II, p. 9); let it restrict its special attention to God: *Keep yourself always before God as if you inner eye was unable to see anything other than Him* (L.S. I, p. 340). Rest not in yourself, nor in men or things. In God alone the soul finds rest (L.S. III, 421). This is a truly Augustinian attitude.

Libermann is original, less in pointing out sanctification as the end of life, than in the method he proposes, the quality of the holiness he presents to souls. They must be shown the way of great sanctity: as a matter of justice, that is own to them. As a matter of charity, it is right to introduce them to this transcendence which gives meaning to their secret aspirations and an explanation of the restlessness they feel, which is indicative of this. He regrets that so any directors require only the minimum of those they direct instead of urging them to greater fervour. In the COMMENTARY OF ST JOHN we read the following lines which betray a breath of indignation at this: *Directors unceasingly preach moderation instead of giving free rein, instead of allowing souls to fly on the wings of faith. They should fear much more to cool this enthusiasm given by faith, than to protect them from imprudence. Prudence is a virtue that is dangerous to cultivate. He who does so more often than not will find false instead of true prudence: the prudence of his pride rather than the prudence of God* (Comm. pp. 330-331). For his part, Libermann himself always followed this method of spiritual shock in dealing with souls: *When I met a soul of apparently high aspiration, by that I mean a soul that appeared to be called to the perfection of the interior life (and they are more numerous than people think) I began by presenting him with a high ideal of Christian perfection, so that he might be impressed and uplifted. I acted thus because in his interior life God urged him on strongly. Seeing the height and beauty of the ideal, the soul was enraptured and felt an ardent desire to attain to this beautiful and glorious state* (L.S. II, pp. 388-389 letter 206). All these expressions, descriptive of the tactics of the Director and their effect upon the one directed, define, in intention and in result, the method of shock. Libermann appeals to those he directs to give up a life of ambiguity and equivocation, illogical and painful, whereby things are only half-done: *Why, my friend, do you choose to lead an aimless life, always doing a balancing-act between a holy life and*

a natural one? Why do you always prowl about the senses, seeking to enjoy, to savour piety, seeking to pass in review the sentiments you experience? (L.S. I, pp. 418-419).

To open up to souls the infinite horizons of highest perfection, to despise the prudence of the flesh, to pursue ever-recurring natural cowardice, does not mean leaving, abandoning, the solid earth of experience, nor forgetting the elementary laws of psychology. So he makes several points to prevent souls from straying from the right path. Firstly, supernatural holiness is not a reaction of temperament or character, a kind of behaviour. Character is not the positive and efficient cause of holiness: a holiness of character is a holiness non-existent, for grace has little part in it (L.S. III, pp. 91-98: all letter 258, pp. 89-119).

His conviction that grace makes light of character, that a disposition towards is not a cause of, did not prevent Libermann from seeking to know the tendencies of those he directed and adapting his advice accordingly. He had also marvellous intuition. Speaking of the sensitiveness of one of his correspondents he shrewdly observes: *With this type of character, it is ordinarily a case of double or quits: it can lead to the highest holiness and sometimes to the loss of every thing* (C.p. 448).

To aim after sublime holiness is not to seek a perfection that is abstract, absolute, chimeric. Libermann writes: We conceive for ourselves a perfect idea of things and we wish these ideas to be realised in their entirety. That is not and never has been the way of Providence (L.S. III, 530; letter 358, pp. 530-538). Realist, he is aware of the difficulties, the impossibilities, the limits of human beings: *We should desire to see all perfect and do all possible calmly, moderately, prudently, to lead men and things in this way: but we must also be convinced that, where there are men there is imperfection. We should try to get what we can without breaking people; otherwise we lose twenty times as much as we gain: at the end of the day, if we are not careful, we shall find that we ourselves are far from the perfection we exact so absolutely from others. I have noticed how the great saints, the real saints, have always acted in the way I have explained; whereas, the little saints, those who have simply taken some steps forward in the way of piety, act exactly in the opposite sense* (C.p. 622).

Finally, perfection is not the exclusive privilege of religious life, either in law or fact. It is not tied to institutions or categories but to personal generosity. To one of his nieces who wrote to him on the

problem of her vocation and the road to follow, he replies: Religious life is undoubtedly intended to make it easier to acquire virtue, but a holy life in the world is not without its merit also. On the Day of Judgement there will be many people whose lives were spent in the world who will pass before many trained in convents (L.S. III, 599).

The Actuality of Libermann

After these analyses, a synthesis is called for. To attempt to assess the distinctive characteristics of this spirituality in a few words is, at the same time, to present the full actuality.

If we have properly understood it, it appears to lie in the following principles: mystical, evangelical, voluntarist; and in the following method: experimental, structural, efficacious. We explain.

Principles:

Mystical because directed more to union with God than to acquiring virtues: the second follows as a consequence of the first: *ama et fac quod vis*. It also stresses more the action of God on the soul than the effort of the soul to respond, necessary though this be. It is a *spirituality of passivity* because it is a spirituality mystical in intention.

Evangelical: Jesus is the person to imitate, the essential truth is to be sought in his message. Hence, the universality of this way of perfection: it is that of Him who said: *I am the Way*. Because it is evangelical in content it is a *Universalist Spirituality*.

Voluntarist, in the sense that, without disdaining the role of knowledge, it considers holiness an exercise of will, which expresses itself in love and is transfigured by grace. Spirituality of will with regard to its fundamental aspiration, it is a *Spirituality of love and liberty*, hence confidence and self-abandonment.

The method devised by our teacher is in function of these three principles:

The object of life is union with God;

The norm of holiness is the holiness of Jesus;

Sanctification is a work of love.

Means:

Libermann's spirituality is

Experimental: all souls are different: all are led by God in different ways. Direction should be adjusted to the *infinite liberty of the Holy Spirit* and the *indomitable personality of each soul*. It is for the soul to listen to and obey the holy Spirit; for the counsellor, to try to discern in the soul the design of God.

Structural, that is, aiming rather to create spiritual structures in the soul, to root it in states of love, prayer, peace, rather than to artificially impose upon it limits, acts and exercises. These latter, though indispensable to the establishment of the structure and necessary for its maintenance afterwards must always be considered only as conditions.

Efficacious, because, centred on Jesus, it unites the soul to this Divine Person, and through Him to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Presenting the ideal of perfection with all it demands of us arouses the latent energies in us which, if they were not at the service of the Spirit, would certainly be seized upon by the senses.

Only the person who misunderstands our times, their attractions and repugnances, their choices and their refusals could deny from this, we believe, faithful synthesis that the doctrine we have set forth is contemporary. In fact, our contemporaries, who are so impressed by St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila, whose works they read willingly, are truly open to mysticism. They are hungry for God and little attracted to a morality which does not crown or provoke mysticism. With St Teresa of Lisieux and Charles de Foucauld, they have returned to the Gospel as a substantial source of spiritual nourishment, of which they wish to make a rule of life. They no longer wish to be enslaved by systems or methods. They have discovered, in the light of communication philosophies, that love defines the human person, that religion is personal or it is nothing, that religion therefore is linked with love. They are suspicious of purely intellectual gymnastics, and they violently reject, under the influence of existentialism, all forms of idealism that are divorced from the reality of life. Often with anguished curiosity, they are caught up with their experiences. Extreme experiences, like those of the Saints, overwhelm and conquer them. They are convinced that they have given themselves to God when they have set themselves up a situation of consecration and not just when

they have worked through, in pharasaic detail, a series of exercises that no longer correspond to the most authentic aspirations of their souls. Finally, while aware of their cowardice and fragility, which disposes them to grace, and because they have better assimilated the Sermon on the Mount they cry out for men of God, of whom they demand the message of Jesus in all its vigour and purity. Even though they still be their daily bread, they vomit forth all that is insipid and mediocre. They are more tempted to draw away from us if we do not challenge them than if we ask too much of them.

If these analyses are correct, our analysis of the doctrinal content of Libermann and our phenomenological analysis of our contemporaries, then the glorious and venerable Founder of the Holy Ghost Fathers is likely to be understood and followed. On October 22, 1837, he wrote the following lines to a Seminary Director:

I know with certain knowledge that I am only a servant in the Church of God. I should not make the mistake of counting myself among the friends of the heavenly Spouse like you, but among those who serve in his house L.S. I, p. 330).

A friend of the Spouse he certainly was: a servant of the Church he always remains.

Pierre Blanchard